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ABSTRACT

The demand for competency based education reflects a desire for more public, consistent, and objective standards of student assessment. This demand implies a change in the definition and interrelations among four operational functions of the school: instruction, acculturation, supervision, and certification. The institution of externally referenced performance standards also interferes with the current teacher-centered mechanisms for gaining student compliance in four ways. It violates the beliefs that teachers alone have the right to set evaluation standards for students. Second, it changes the role of teachers from judge to facilitator. Third, it forces a shift toward more interaction among teachers. Finally, teacher power over students, formerly based on their monopoly over evaluation and certification, will be replaced by opportunities to work with students on common goals. This potential loss of power is seen as a major source of resistance to any change in ground rules for student evaluation. Nevertheless, one can anticipate an improvement in both learning climates and incentives for success as standards become more visible and clearly defined. (Author/JM)

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USING PUBLIC PERFORMANCE STANDARDS TO REDEFINE THE GAMES OF POWER, LEGITIMACY AND SECRECY IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The analysis views the emergence of pressures for improved school effectiveness and accountability (often thought of as "The Competency Movement") in the light of a theoretical framework describing the fundamental outcome expectations and operational functions of schools. This movement involves the restructuring of both the goal and role bases of school operations. These are pressures for greater clarity and public information regarding the goals and outcomes of schools and for greater flexibility in the role and opportunity structures around which they are currently structured. These pressures imply a change in the definition of and interelations among the four operational functions of the school: i.e., instruction, acculturation, supervision, and certification. The "power" of the school over students resides fundamentally in its monopoly on evaluation and certification of student achievement and behavior. The emergence of public, and criterion-referenced performance standards will undermine traditional teacher prerogatives for defining the "credit game" in their own particularistic terms. This potential loss of power is seen as a major source of resistance to any change in existing groundrules for student evaluation, promotion, or graduation.

USING PUBLIC PERFORMANCE STANDARDS TO REDEFINE
THE GAMES OF POWER, LEGITIMACY AND SECRECY IN SCHOOLS

During the past five years a groundswell of state level educational policies has imposed new performance and accountability demands on local school systems and students. Over thirty state legislatures or boards of education currently require that some form of formal, publicly accepted standards of performance be developed and applied to the periodic assessment of student learning. This quite disparate set of policies and programs is widely known as the Competency Movement.

As argued by Spady (1977, 1978, and 1979) and Spady and Mitchell (1977), this "movement" contains at least two distinct philosophical and operational thrusts, one stressing the formal testing and assignment of students (i.e. Minimum Competency Testing — MCT) and the other the transformation of the instructional and assessment delivery systems of schooling (i.e., Competency Based Education — CBE). While the difference in the operational features and implications of these two approaches are substantial and deserve careful examination, they do not require elaboration in order to develop the analysis which follows.

The Competency Movement and Educational Change

Simply stated, the competency movement as a whole represents a substantial challenge to the time-honored structures and practices in public elementary and secondary schools. Resistance to this movement on the part of many educators needs to be understood both in terms of the narrowness (whether

imagined or real) of the basic skill learning outcomes commonly mandated in MCT policies, and also because competency based approaches demand substantial alteration of four critical aspects of schooling practice. They are: 1) the belief systems which guide the intentionality and behavior of the actors in the schooling enterprise; 2) the role definitions and capacities required of these actors in carrying out their responsibilities; 3) the structural arrangements which define and constrain the assignment and movement of students through the instructional system; and 4) the system of power and incentives which induce and constrain the willingness of actors to define and perform their roles in particular ways.

What consultants and administrators often fail to take into account in developing "change" or "intervention" strategies is the exent to which each of these four factors is related to, influences, and is influenced by each of the others and, therefore, must be explicitly taken into account in any kind of implementation plan. Of particular concern here, however, are a limited set of issues related to the bearing which the competency movement has on the third and fourth of these factors, the structuring of the school experience and the system of power relations between individual teachers and their students.

According to Spady (1978 and 1979), the competency movement needs to be interpreted as a challenge to two fundamental sets of structural arrangements in schools: the certification system and the opportunity system. Traditionally schooling has been organized around finite, time-bound units of instruction called courses or school years, in which students are given a single opportunity to reach a satisfactory standard of performance which individual teachers define in their own terms. In such a system students who "fail" to meet these standards within the time allotted are typically given no

credit at all for the learning they have accomplished and must choose between repeating the entire course or school year and disqualification from particular program options. In this system "course credit" is conferred through labels (or symbols) called marks or grades which lack specific reference points regarding the particular criteria and actual behaviors which underlie them. This system of grading and conferring credit is inherently subjective, inconsistent, comparative, private, and potentially particularistic; and it constitutes what Spady has called a vague referenced system of standards.

Simply put, the competency movement has challenged both the legitimacy and utility of this vague referenced certification system. The public demand for either standardized, norm referenced test scores or criterion referenced performance indicators for students implicity reflects two things: a loss of confidence in the validity, meaning, and interpretability of teacher grades and a desire for standards that are more public, consistent, and objective. To some this entire set of issues can be explained by the oversimplified notion known as "grade inflation."

As suggested by the elements in Figure 1, the movement from the vague-referenced and limited-opportunity structures that govern traditional school practice to the fixed-standard, expanded-opportunity conditions which underlie Mastery Learning and Competency Based Education approaches represents a dramatic shift in all four of the conditions affecting organizational change just noted. For example, the Mastery Learing theorists such as Bloom (1971 and 1976) and Block (1971 and 1976) and Block and Burns (1976) have written extensively about changes in belief systems and role performance which must accompany the implementation of a "learning for mastery" instructional program. And Spady (1974, 1978, and 1979) and Mitchell and Spady(1978) have identified some of the sociological and organizational dimensions of changes

CERTIFICATION/ STANDARDS STRUCTURE	TIME/OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE	
	FIXED/SINGLE	FLEXIBLE/MULTIPLE
VAGUE REFERENCED/ VARIABLE, PRIVATE	Traditional School Practice	Humanistic Developmental Approach
CRITERION REFERENCED/ FIXED, PUBLIC	Minimum Competency Testing Accountability	Mastery Learning/ Competency Based Education Reform
	(Exclusionary Model)	(Inclusionary Model)

Figure 1 — A Framework of Opportunity and Certification Conditions Affecting Instructional Delivery

which must accompany "outcome based" approaches of this kind. But issues regarding the power shifts which also accompany the impending implementation of these approaches have not been adequately explored in the educational literature even though they remain central to understanding how control of the instructional process in schools is to proceed. The following discussion represents a first step in addressing those issues.

The Major Functions and Outcome Expectations of the School

In our initial analysis of the organizational implications of the competency movement (Spady and Mitchell, 1977), we suggested that both MCT and CBE policies could be explained in terms of a shift in the relative importance of two fundamental components of all organizational activity: goals and roles. The competency movement implies that a change should occur in school operations in which the emphasis on time and role defined activity should be replaced by an emphasis on goal based decisions. In other words, the assignment and reassignment of students to task activities and instructional programs should be based primarily on the accomplishment of visible learning or performance goals rather than on preestablished time factors controlled by the clock, schedule, and calendar.

This shift from role based to goal based operations and decision making clearly implies a parallel shift in the bases on which the control and rewarding of action must also rest. In such goal based systems one can anticipate a lessening of control over (or reward for) role occupancy in lieu of an increased emphasis on controlling and rewarding the goals reached and achievement produced.

Although the emergence of the competency movement brings this tension between goal based and role based management and decision making into sharp relief, we remain convinced, because of our other lines of inquiry into the action and management systems of schools (see Mitchell and Spady, 1978 and Spady and Mitchell, 1979), that this tension between goal and role activity is only one aspect of a larger set of organizational problems which schools face. From our theoretical perspective, these problems reflect the inherent tensions in all organized social entities between two pervasive kinds of goals, both which must be successfully realized in order for the social group

to remain viable. The first of these inevitabilities concerns problems associated with the production of resources sufficient to ensure, at the very least, the physical survival of the group. These productivity problems are confronted through the establishment and pursuit of what we call achievement goals. The other pervasive problem faced by all social organizations concerns their establishing and maintaining the symbols, traditions and rituals which embody the systems of values and meaning that govern the culture and norms of the group. These are necessary in providing philosophical and spiritual guidance and direction for group members.

At the same time, all social organizations must also resolve the inherent tensions between the two major mechanisms (or role systems) available for getting members to pursue each of these sets of goals. One mechanism stresses the formal obligation of members to comply with these social- and performance-role standards, the other stresses the need for the informal, spontaneous and voluntary affiliation and intrinsic involvement of members in both their achievement and social pursuits.

When combined, as illustrated in Figure 2, these pairs of goal and role problems account for the four distinctive and competing arenas of action and influence which pervade the concerns of all social groups. Note that the pursuit of achievement goals, located in the bottom row of the figure, places a premium on dynamic action and effective results, whereas cultural goals portrayed in the top row of the figure, stress social stability and harmony. In the same way, the left column of the figure suggests that one approach to accomplishing these goals requires the subordination of individual interests through formal behavioral and performance accountability, while the other column emphasizes personal initiative, opportunity, engagement, and involvment in both social and work relations.

The resulting combinations of these goal/role orientations define and locate within the quadrants of the figure the four major arenas of social action found, for example, in factories, families, and churches, as well as in schools: i.e., engagement in the social culture, engagement in achievement/performance, achievement/performance accountability, and social/behavioral accountability. Note again that from our perspective, the movement from role

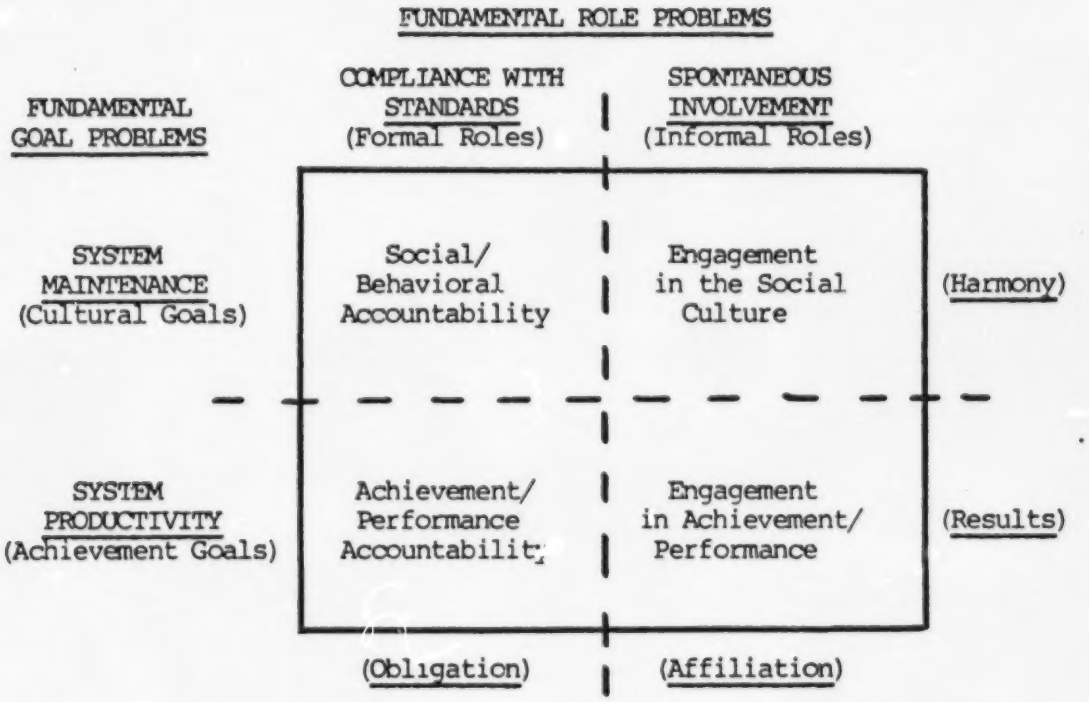

Figure 2 — The Action System of Social Organizations as Defined by their Fundamental Goal and Role Problems

to goal based modes of operation implied in the competency movement represents a shift in the predominant pattern of school and classroom control away from an emphasis on social/behavioral based accountability to achievement/

performance based accountability. The theoretical nature of this shift will become clearer as we examine Figure 3.

As with our analysis in the two papers most recently referenced above, we are suggesting in Figure 3 that there is a very specific and familiar vocabulary associated with the school's embodiment of these generic goal, role, and action systems which gives the framework depicted in Figure 2 more concrete expression and intuitive appeal. Figure 3 can best be deciphered by recognizing that the school conducts a specific set of activities or operational functions which correspond directly to the goal and role problems just identified. That is, productivity goals are addressed by the instruction

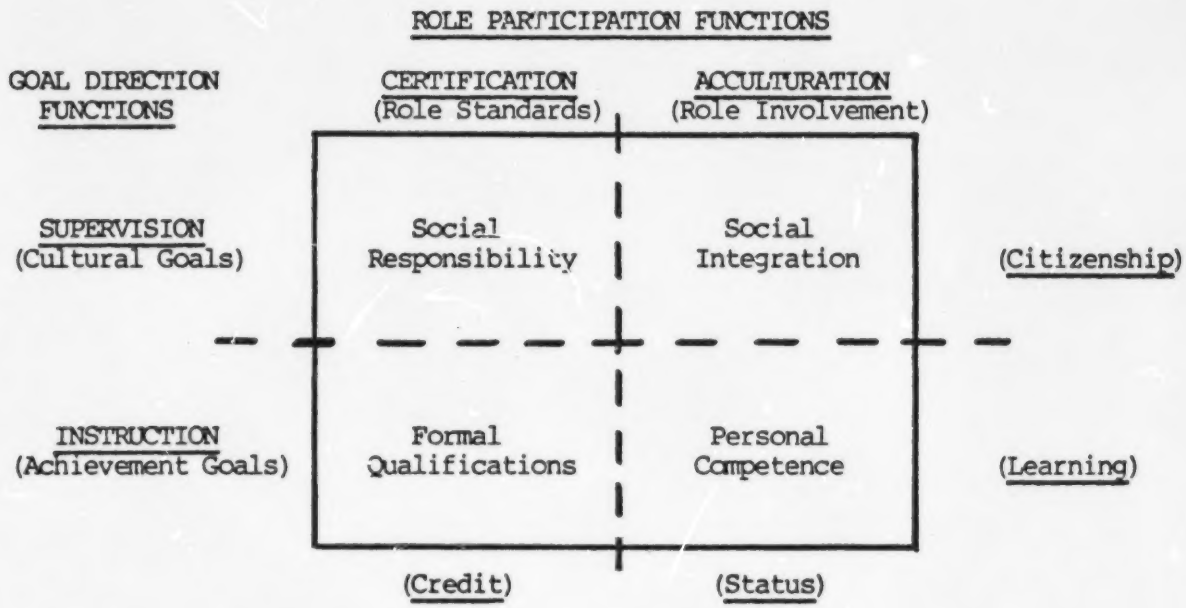

Figure 3 — The Action System of the School as Defined by Its Operational Functions, Action Targets, and Student Outcome Expectations.

system, cultural goals by the supervision system, role standards and accountability by the certfication system, and role involvment and engagement by the acculturation system.

It is these four operational functions, then, (i.e. instruction, supervision, certification, and acculturation), which constitute the essential action agenda of both the school as a whole and each of its classrooms; and each has a fundamental "target" of great relevance to both the staff and clients of schools. These targets or action "games" are noted at the bottom and right hand borders of the figure. They are: learning, citizenship, credit, and status (respectively). That is to say, participation in each of these functional activities is oriented toward a special set of inducements and concerns, which, for example, in the case of the instructional system involves student learning and in the case of the certification system concerns the acquisition of credit.

There is another respect, however, in which the "targets" of the schooling process are even more clearly defined, and these are reflected by the four terms located in the quadrants of the diagram. Based on our earlier theoretical work, we view these four terms (i.e. personal competence, social integration, social responsibility, and formal qualifications) as reflecting the universal expectations which society holds for the ultimate outcomes of students' participation in the schooling process. That is, these four outcomes represent the qualities and behaviors which students would manifest in their adult lives if they successfully embodied the generic conditions defined in the corresponding four quadrants in Figure 2.

For example, successful engagement in achievement and performance activities (lower right quadrant) translates itself, through the impact of the instruction and acculturation systems, into personal competence. Likewise,

successful achievement and performance accountability (lower left quadrant) is relected, through the influence of the instruction and certification systems, in students obtaining formal qualifications. The other two outcomes, social responsibility and social integration, can be similarly explained.

In an even more fundamental respect, we have also suggested in our earlier work that these four qualities are essential to societal members if they are to assist in solving, rather than further exacerbating, society's basic productivity and maintenance problems. That is, a society which hopes to prosper and sustain itself must depend on citizens who are socially responsible, socially integrated, personally competent, and qualified to enter and pursue complex occupational or technical roles.

When viewed from this perspective, the emergence of the competency movement during the past few years has forced educators to address alleged deficiencies in the last two of these outcome arenas in particular. The movement criticizes deficiences in the effectiveness of both the school's "learning game" and "credit game" and the way in which these two games overlap and reinforce each other.

The Operational Curricula of the School

The nature of both this relationship and the criticism directed toward it can be further illuminated by incorporating into the conceptual framework just established alternative meanings and interpretations of the term "curriculum." Curriculum specialists and practitioners are accustomed to thinking of the curriculum as "a course of study" or "body of material," and thereby subdivide and describe its components by subject or program area (such as science and humanities, or general business and college preparatory). However, because of our interest in the broader set of outcomes identified in Figure 3 on which

the schooling process as a whole is grounded, we have chosen a more comprehensive conception of the concept itself.

In our view, a curriculum is any set of deliberately organized experiences intended to transform the beliefs, learning, or behavior of those engaged in them and is, therefore, congruent with the general concept of socialization as broadly utilized by sociologists. When considered in this broad, sociological fashion, it is an easy matter to link the notions of socialization and curriculum both to the four action games just identified in Figure 3 and to the functional activities which define them, since each of these games has a different aspect of student behavior and performance as its goal, and since each of the resulting names we have given to these "curricula" is familiar to and widely used by educators.

Figure 4 represents a simple extension of the concepts introduced and developed in Figures 2 and 3. Its unique feature is in identifying and mapping the terms we have chosen to describe the four "functional curricula" of the school. While each of these terms (i.e., official, extra, hidden, and required) has a familiar and concrete meaning to practicing educators and while we intend to retain as much of that popular meaning as possible, we are, nevertheless, using them to refer to the particular activities defined by this theoretical framework.

For example, what people generally refer to as the curriculum of the school, we call the "official" curriculum. It is this official curriculum which embodies the intentional, textbook based instructional system of the school. Its fundamental target is student learning, and it contributes to both student competence (in support of the acculturation system) and the earning of formal qualifications (in support of the certification system). Similarly, the "extra curriculum" of the school needs to be understood as having primarily an acculturation focus in which students achieve status in

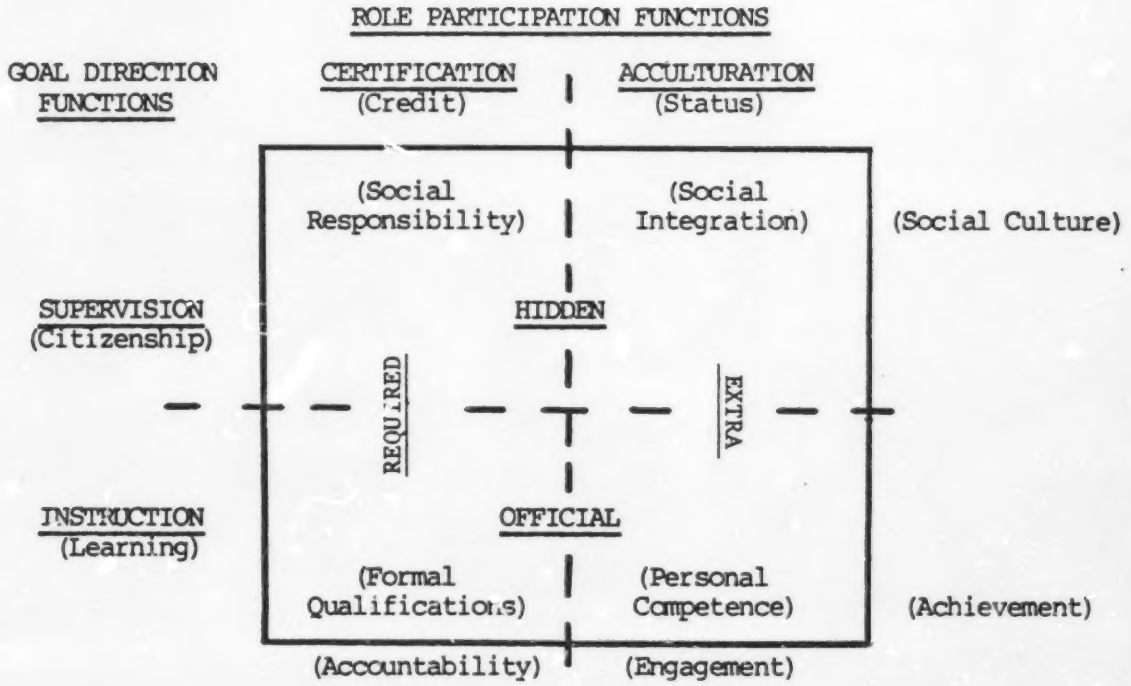

Figure 4 — The Action System of the School as Defined by Its Operational Functions, Action Targets, Student Outcome Expectations, and Conceptions of the Curriculum.

each others' eyes through both the quality of their engagement in social interaction and the attractiveness of the personal competence they develop. As our diagram suggests, the extra curriculum also reinforces and extends the learning goals of the official curriculum as well as serving as an important vehicle in the supervision of students.

The "hidden curriculum" is a term which humanist and radical critics of the schools such as Illich and Freire have used to describe the sometimes covert and sometimes transparent strategies employed by teachers in supervising students and structuring their instructional experiences. Its focus is clearly on influencing the conditions and terms of students' membership in the broader culture of the school, especially with regard to matters of deportment, attendance, and punctuality.

Finally, the "required curriculum" reflects the ultimate pragmatism of school life. Its focus is the grading and credit system used by teachers to induce in students satisfactory compliance with standards of both behavior and effort, on the one hand, and adequate instructional performance on the other. As suggested by the visual representation in Figure 4, this required curriculum embodies the formal accountability system of the school and translates both the "hidden" supervisory agenda and the "official" instructional agenda into formal notations and records of students' qualifications.

Structure, Power and the Credit Game

At one level, then, it is easy to recognize in the interrelations among these operational functions and curricula some of the concerns articulated by the competency movement. For one thing, the certification system as it is now defined allows at least three different aspects of both the hidden and official curricula to remain obscured in the structure and operation of the credit game. First, the current system of vague referenced certification standards (Figure 1) clearly allows for both supervision and instruction factors to be built into the assigning of grades and credit. Second, the specification of which factors are being considered, how they are weighted, and against what kind of metric or standard they are referenced also remains hidden, usually from both students and the public.

Third, the fixed-time, single-opportunity instructional delivery and evaluation system discussed in conjunction with Figure 1 is itself an important component of the supervision/membership system which remains hidden in most analyses of instructional effectiveness or student achievement. That is, student performance is being judged and labelled under conditions which constrain the time students are given to develop skills or master material. This is done according to the institutionally determined time parameters used to define their membership in a particular course or grade level. The grades recorded at the end of these specific

time periods usually remain unalterable, despite whatever subsequent learning the student may do after the instructional block and accompanying performance evaluations have concluded.

The second important connection linking this analysis to the emerging competency movement concerns the "required" nature of the certification system. As noted earlier, the relationships which currently exist between the official and required curricula clearly suggest that not all of what is officially to be learned gets evaluated and translated into "official" credit. From our perspective two important implications of this fact deserve attention. First, what is most fundamentally "required" by the certification system is not learning per se, but credit itself. That is, it is credit, not knowledge or skill as such, that is the negotiable commodity in students' achieving the formal qualifications necessary for access to almost any post-high school educational or occupational opportunity. Second, it is these extremely pragmatic and utilitarian selection (i.e., access and opportunity) consequences to which the certification system contributes that make the credit game more "real" to future-oriented, mobility-conscious students than any other pursuit in the school. In other words, the term "required" has a meaning to students in both a <u>legal</u> sense, in which certification and earning cerdit are institutionalized components of the schooling experience, and in a practical sense in which one's future life chances are <u>necessarily</u> and <u>compellingly</u> linked to the earning of credit.

It is, we believe, this inescapable link between certification opportunities and future life chances that defines the fundamental vulnerability and dependence of students on the private grading decisions made by teachers. Our educational traditions have endorsed teachers' "rights" to exercise their "professional" discretion in defining the groundrules both for student deportment (i.e., social responsibility in the classroom and school) and for work assignments

and grading standards. This autonomy in establishing and enforcing the behavioral and performance norms of each individual classroom is the fundamental basis of teachers' formal power.

At issue here, we believe, are two things. First, teachers use their power to grade in order to enforce classroom rules and their personal relations with students as well as to label learning and achievement. Second, as noted earlier, teachers are rarely required to reveal or justify either to individual students or to the public at large the criteria used in defining student work assignments, designing tests, evaluating student performance, and assigning grades. The potential for subjectivity, particularism, discrimination, and even irrelevance in teacher grading is, therefore, both real and institutionalized, making students' cooperation and ability to read the unique expectations and dispositions of individual teachers essential skills in the acquisition of formal credentials. Consequently, neither student effort nor student achievement sufficiently guarantees school success.

However, while the policy makers who initiated the competency movement sought to bring this subjective and inaccurate certification system "under rational control" (see Wise, 1979) by establishing externally referenced standards "that would really count," it is not clear that they had issues of fairness and openness in mind in doing so. Instead, most testing programs can be interpreted as strategies for raising perceived promotion or graduation standards and, thereby, for making students themselves more accountable for their institutionally validated success. But when such externally imposed standards are imposed without simultaneously improving instructional quality and delivery, some students may face even greater potential jeopardy than before. Therefore, when the power to ultimately certify student achievement is taken out of the hands of teachers, greater clarity, objectivity, and fairness in the assessment/evaluation process may

result, but with students remaining as dependent on the instructional system for reaching those standards as before. This merely shifts the source of fundamental student vulnerability rather than removes it, even when teachers use their private, vague, and subjective bases of grading in favor of students as well as against them.

This ability to manipulate grading in a "favorable" direction (through reverse discrimination) is seen by some teachers as a way to motivate or encourage students. In some cases it probably works although infuriating accountability oriented policy makers (who accuse teachers of letting standards slip) as a result. Consistent teacher favoritism keeps some students alert to teacher expectations, anxious to please and indebted to teachers for giving them the benefit of the doubt; but it can, of course, provide students with paper credentials as well as impressions of their achievement progress and potential that are inflated and deceptive. We fear that such practices create an "illusion of success" that subsequent experience may prove to be invalid, immoral, or both. In such cases the student's potential vulnerability and lack of real skill may be exposed far too late for the school itself either to correct the problem or to take responsibility for it.

However, while clear and objectively referenced standards may lessen the bias in grading and certification standards, they may not reduce their ultimate "unfairness." By this we mean that fairness is contingent on consistency in the administration of standards, the level at which the standards are set, and the opportunities available both for developing the necessary skills and for demonstrating the existence of such skills. Having externally defined standards addresses only the first of these issues.

From our perspective, the policy choices articulated in Figure 1 between MCT and CBE programs are basic to the resolution of these other two issues. Two things differentiate these two approaches. The first is that the flexible-time,

multiple-opportunity structure of CBE programs reflects a deliberate attempt to keep the necessary instructional delivery options open to students as long as possible while enabling those who require less time to reach existing standards more rapidly than allowed by time-based approaches. In other words, CBE and Mastery Learning represent inclusionary models of educational opportunity and place the teacher in a more inherently supportive role vis-a-vis students.

Second, there is a danger in MCT programs that the solution to the achievement problem may be sought in the tests themselves. Such approaches rightly assume that an enormous amount of "teaching to the test" may result when external testing policies are instituted. Large scale survey tests of this kind may tap only a narrow slice of the school's "total" curriculum and therefore miss large amounts of what some students can do. In addition, "crash" instructional programs designed to prepare students for such tests may either articulate poorly with test requirements or rest on an instructional technology no more effective than that which led to the imposition of new performance demands in the first place. The ultimate danger, then, is that policy makers may succeed in replacing a flawed, unfair subjective system of credentialing with one that is equally flawed and unfair but embraced as a solution because of its "objectivity." Only when performance assessment is closely integrated with a multiple-opportunity, adaptive instructional system (as in CBE and Mastery Learning) can one both document particular levels of accomplishment and improve the opportunity conditions of more students at the same time.

Conclusions

The preceding analysis provides some important insights into the relationship between the competency movement and established school practice. In particular, we have stressed that the certification system of the school represents

the locus of institutional power over students both because it embodies and governs the groundrules for receiving the performance evaluations, credit, and diplomas necessary for post-school placement opportunities and because it reflects, in an ambiguous but impervious fashion, subjective judgements about student character and behavior as well as academic accomplishment.

We have suggested that the vagueness and diffuseness of teacher referenced standards and grading represent a dominant mechanism for gaining student compliance, either through the threat of lowering grades or the promise of raising them. The introduction of externally referenced standards of performance through the competency movement (among other things) interferes with this teacher-centered control mechanism in four fundamental ways discussed early in the paper.

First, it violates traditionally supported beliefs that individual teachers alone have the right to define criteria of judgement, set standards, and assign grades as they deem appropriate for individual students. Second, it changes the role definition of teachers away from controller and judge toward that of supporter and facilitator of student accomplishment. Third, it forces a shift toward more interaction and collegial planning (i.e., more centralized and consistent instructional delivery and program structure) among teachers since performance standards carry with them the expectation of a congruence between what is tested and what is taught.

Fourth, the basis of teacher influence over students will shift away from a power-dominated to a more legitimacy oriented mode of operation. Public expectations and standards essentially redefine both staff and student responsibility in the teaching/learning process by moving the focus away from manipulating each other (for compliance, favors, or whatever) to jointly reaching a common goal that is not sensitive to particularistic treatment. In short, such standards may serve to depersonalize the teacher/student relationship in the

certification arena while simultaneously strengthening their bonds in the instructional arena. If opportunity conditions are left open, as in Mastery Learning and CBE programs, one can anticipate an improvement in both learning climates and incentives for success as standards become more visible and clearly defined.

We believe, therefore, that the new wave of classroom-observational and organizational-effects research would do well to introduce variables such as these into their investigations, for they modify some of the fundamental conditions that make teacher-student relations and classroom structure what they have been for most of this century.

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